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ABSTRACT

After providing a brief history of the development of the role of the school district business administrator, the author presents a model for a preparation program for district business administrators. The model is based on the author's earlier study in which he identified and validated 195 competencies in 23 task areas. Assumptions that guided the development of the model include the following: the traditional coursework approach has serious limitations; individual knowledge, skills, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses of those in the program will vary depending on student background; and a modular, competency-oriented approach to individual program planning and design may be the most effective and efficient approach to use. The model consists of four major components: assessment of the student prior to his or her entry into the program; program design to prepare a course of study for each student; implementation of the program designed; and continuous evaluation of the appropriateness of content, the adequacy of the strategies used to meet objectives, and the setting of the instructional process. The program is envisioned to be approximately two years long or the equivalent of 22 courses of five quarter hours each. (Author/IRT)

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Model Program for the Academic Preparation of School Business Administrators

by

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Background

Since the creation of the first public schools in the United States, certain business functions have been essential to keep the schools operating. According to Hill (1970), the necessity for the appointment of a full time school business administrator was first established by an ordinance passed in 1841 by the City Council of Cleveland, Ohio (p.9). The "Acting Manager" of schools for that city school system was charged with the responsibility of accounting for funds, purchasing, payroll, maintenance of school houses and financial reports. It is interesting to note that this first business manager was appointed 12 years before the appointment of the first Superintendent of schools for that city (Hill, 1970, p.9). In those early years this was not an unusual practice.

That the field of school business administration has grown and changed extensively since that early period is well documented and is manifested by the membership of International ASBO and the state and province organizations that are extant in the United States and Canada today. Role changes of the business official since those early years are well documented by the literature, particularly by those authors of school business management textbooks published during the last 30 years. The five basic tasks

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assigned as the responsibility of Cleveland's first school business manager have grown to include at least 28 task areas as identified and validated by McGuffey (1978).

Concomitant with the growth in the number of school business task areas, an enormous increase in the number of specialists has occurred. These specialists represent, for the most part, the technical specialties identified by the 28 task areas validated in the competency study already referenced (McGuffey, 1978). The role of the business specialist, like that of the business manager, has likewise changed.

This reference to changing roles deserves some attention. The early business manager was a specialist in the field of business, not an educator. Consequently, many school districts followed this pattern of management and there developed in different sections of the country, the "dual control" concept, wherein business functions and tasks were organized and controlled independently of the superintendent of schools. Meanwhile, in other sections of the nation, the full responsibility for school operation was assigned to the superintendent who managed both instruction and business tasks.

Additionally, growth and development in the economic sector of our nation and concomitant population growth and mobility, placed heavy demands on the schools for services. School district merger coupled with population growth and expansion in the 1920's and again in the 1950's and 1960's increased the size and complexity

of school districts, as well as the task of delivering educational services to school clientele. The growth in Federal programs and funds for education, changes in educational programs due to civil rights legislation and court decisions, the accountability movement, competency based educational programs, equalization programs, and so on have made education a multi-billion dollar business. Obviously, the task of managing such large sums of money and the resources purchased by it in a very complex and multi-faceted environment requires highly specialized skills for efficient management. Clearly, it is unlikely that one person, no matter how knowledgeable, how skilled or how efficient, can perform all the school business services needed in a school district today. A division of labor is required, and the employment of specialists with technical backgrounds is essential. Likewise, the person who plans, organizes, staffs, influences, controls and evaluates those services must have academic preparation and experience that enables that person to manage the various tasks performed by the growing list of specialists.

A number of studies have shown that the person given overall responsibility for managing the business services program in a school district may have a background in educational administration or a background in engineering or a business field outside of education. In the smaller school districts, the business manager is most likely to be the superintendent. Fensch and Wilson (1974) point out that the first assistant to be appointed by the school superintendent is most likely to be assigned business responsibilities (p. 19).

Purpose

The growing concern for this complex problem of providing academic preparation programs for the modern school business manager led to a study of the competencies needed by school business administrators to perform their duties and responsibilities. This study was completed in 1978. As a follow-up of that study, the University Contacts Committee sought to develop a model program for the preparation of school business administration.

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss one of the program models developed which utilized the findings of the competency study and the research reviewed in conjunction with that study.

Basis for the Development of the Proposed Model

For this analysis, a model was defined as "a representation of the process to be used in the design of a program of study for a potential school business administrator." The model that has been developed is a "theoretical model" of the preparation process, not the classical coursework model which has been used in the past as a basis for student program planning.

There are several basic assumptions that guided the development of the model.

These assumptions are as follows:

1. The traditional coursework approach has serious limitations; for example, the amount of time needed to

complete desirable courses identified in previous research. Scebra (1972) identified 38 courses having some relevance to the work of the school business official with 15 of the list he used considered highly desirable or essential. Furthermore, broad based courses tend to duplicate knowledge and learning experiences held by many students upon entering the program.

2. Individual knowledge, skills, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses will vary depending on student backgrounds of prior work experience and education. Program design should be based on individual needs for knowledge and relevant learning activities rather than a broad brush coursework approach.

3. School business officials, as distinguished from school business administrators, requiring highly technical backgrounds, such as accounting, risk management, engineering, data processing, food service, and the like, will obtain specialized training in appropriate schools and colleges. In other words, it is highly unlikely that colleges of education alone can properly prepare persons to assume the variety of technical roles needed particularly in the business organization of medium and large school districts.

4. Potential school business administrators are persons with successful experience in one or more technical fields or they may be educational subject matter specialists;

thereby, requiring programs tailored to individual's backgrounds in order to produce a well-rounded school business administrator for school district roles. Furthermore, superintendents of small school districts must likewise be prepared to fulfill business responsibilities that are extant in those districts.

5. A modular, competency oriented approach to individual program planning and design may be the most effective and efficient approach to use. This appears particularly appropriate to satisfy the needs due to individual differences and to reduce the time required to complete preparation programs.

Implications of the foregoing assumptions indicate the use of a set of competencies and a modular approach to the development of a course of study for each student. The list of competencies proposed for use in the model is the one developed by McGuffey (1978). McGuffey's initial list contained 264 competencies in 28 task areas; however, after validation of the list, 195 competencies remained in 23 task areas. The 195 validated competencies would be used in the development of modules of instruction. In practice, a module of instruction would be developed for each of the 195 competencies which would form the building blocks for the instructional program. Resource units and courses would be built from the 195 instructional modules.

Description of the Model

The model consists of four major components shown in Figure 1 in addition to the 195 competencies and instructional modules.

These components are as follows:

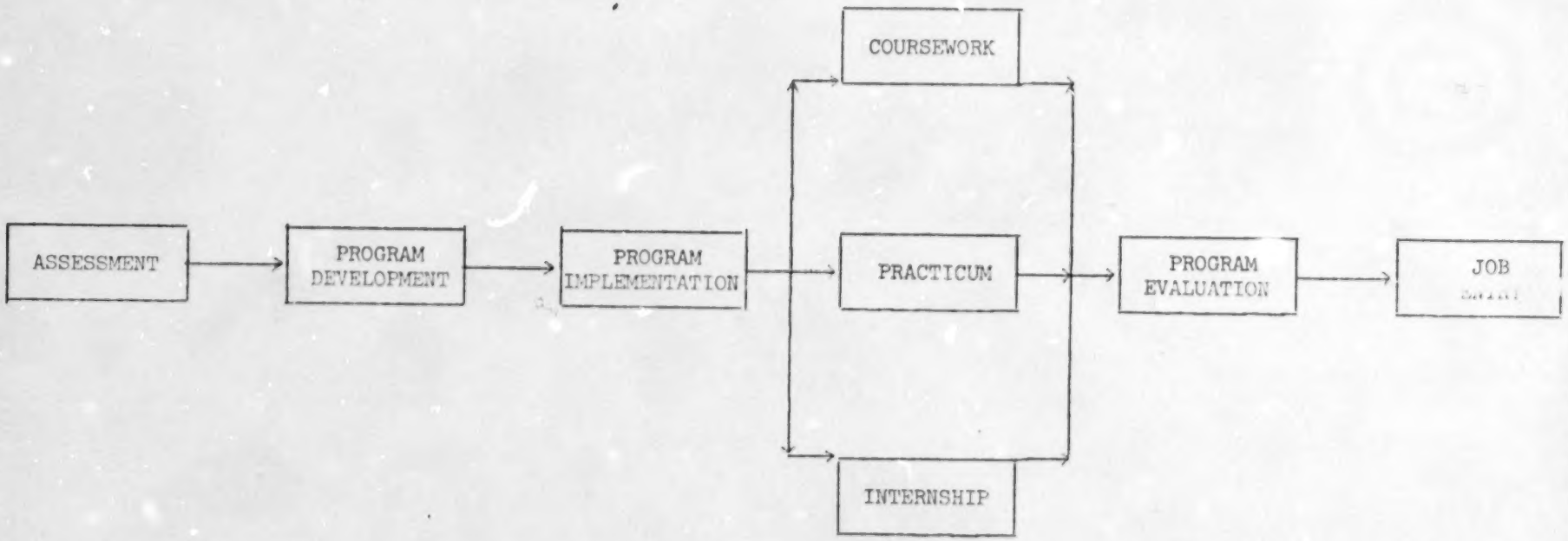
1. Assessment

   The assessment process is used to derive a profile for each student which shows what and how many of 195 competencies have been met by past coursework and experience. The student takes a self assessment inventory to indicate which competencies he/she believes are fulfilled from training and experience. In addition, a pre-test covering the 195 competencies is given as one part of the faculty assessment. Other forms of assessment, such as a "checklist of course content" or an "inventory of experience" might be suitable for use.

2. Program Design

   The goal of the program design phase is to prepare a course of study for each student. Obviously, the competency profile is an important tool in the planning and development of a course of study to correct each student's discrepancies determined from the assessment stage. A list of competencies in which each student is deficient is used to prepare a set of behavioral objectives for each student. Program

COMPPBO
COMPETENCY ORIENTED MODEL
OF A
PREPARATORY PROGRAM FOR THE BUSINESS OFFICIAL



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strategies in the form of coursework, independent study, minilabs, case studies, simulation exercises, and field experience are developed to meet each student's behavioral objectives. The result would constitute a program of study for each student. Each student's program would be entered into the computer and tracked by computer until program design requirements are met.

3. Program Implementation

This is the stage in which each student fulfills the requirements of his/her program design. Coursework, independent study, minilabs, and field experiences would carry regular course credits based on the number of clock hours of instruction necessary to complete the modules of instruction required for each student. As a practical matter, coursework would be built from instructional modules which may require knowledge and skill development. Practicum courses would be built from modules involving minilabs and independent study. Internship courses would be designed to provide field experience for job orientation, for on-task type performance, to extend the range of an individual's experience and to provide an opportunity for some students to integrate knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes and to determine

their interest and fitness for the professional role for which they are being prepared.

4. Evaluation

The evaluation process would be continuous involving the appropriateness of content, the adequacy of the strategies to meet objectives, and setting of the instructional process. Program results based on the behavioral objectives set for each student would likewise be evaluated. Follow-up evaluations would also be made by employers of program graduates and by the student. Student evaluations would be based on the extent that the program has fulfilled both the requirements of the job and the student's expectations. Student performance and fitness for the role would be continuously evaluated by the faculty conducting the instructional program.

Other Considerations

Implementation of this model would require consideration of such concerns as admissions requirements, program levels, academic prerequisites, time required to complete the program, and student class loads.

The prerequisite for the program would be a bachelor's degree in either education or a field related to one of the school business task areas identified in the McGuffey competency study. Admission to the proposed competency

oriented program would be based on the appropriate bachelor's degree, an appropriate GRE score and undergraduate performance. Other admissions criteria could provide some options for exceptional cases.

To complete the program envisioned, approximately two years of graduate study would be required or the equivalent of a total of 22 courses of five quarter hours each. A specialist's degree, given usually after two years of graduate study would be awarded for the successful completion of the program.

An extension of the program to provide advanced graduate seminars, research courses and a dissertation would make the doctorate a possibility, also. Requirements for the doctorate would be based on a college or university's unique requirements.

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